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Title:

Press release: Mr A. J. Grassby

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PRESS STATEMENT FROM THE COMMONWEALTH MINISTER FOR IMMIGRATION,
MR. A.J. GRASSBY.

6.1.73

The Federal Immigration Minister, Mr. Grassby, will visit Adelaide on January 22.

Mr. Grassby said today that this would be the first of his official visits to the capital cities of Australia.

The visit was designed to meet the officers of the Department of Immigration and the members of the Good Neighbour Council and to discuss new initiatives in migration, citizenship and settlement.

Mr. Grassby said that he had decided to visit South Australia first because of the outstanding contribution made by migrants to the development of the State in the post war years, particularly migrants from Britain.

"The progress made by South Australia had put it in the vanguard of Australian development and because of its continuing plans for expansion and my intense interest in the new city project I wanted to make this my first capital city visit in the new portfolio of Immigration."

Mr. Grassby said that he was also anxious to clear up some misunderstandings which had arisen in connection with the new initiatives announced on citizenship.

He said there had been some distortions which indicated a lack of understanding of the present position and what was intended.

The Minister said that he was very concerned that British migrants had been considerably neglected in the overall efforts on citizenship and they had in fact often been left with a mistaken impression which had caused embarrassment and resentment. For example, the impression that had been given over the last twenty years was that they had automatic Australian citizenship. This had never been the case.

Often the British migrant discovered this when he applied for a passport and he was told that he was not an Australian citizen and that he could not receive an Australian passport and he was referred to an embassy or high commission.

"I fully share the disappointment of the people who have come to see me about this over the years because they had been left with a totally false impression."

Mr. Grassby said he had also received protests from British migrants about what happened when they did decide to become Australian citizens.

"While the man from Bologna receives a public welcome and commendation, the man from Bradford gets his citizenship like a dog licence and it is our intention to change this."

There was also a need to streamline Australia's own citizenship so that it had an enhanced status at home and abroad and the description on passports for example of "British Subject" had no relevance and often caused embarrassment and confusion.

Mr. Grassby said the reports which had talked about renouncing British nationality were based on a lack of knowledge of the position of the constituent components of the Commonwealth of Nations.

British nationality or Commonwealth of Nations nationality were the same, were shared by the thirty three countries which made up the Commonwealth of Nations and this nationality was shared by all those countries by virtue of their membership. The most recent addition to the Commonwealth of Nations was Bangla Desh.

Mr. Grassby said therefore that to talk about renouncing British nationality in this context was absurd as it was part of the status of the component of the Commonwealth of Nations.

It was true, however, that many people found the requirement to renounce allegiances which at present appeared in the Citizenship Oath, as quite obnoxious and as it had no legal force in any case, the Minister agreed entirely it should be dropped.

The long overdue revision of the Citizenship Act to bring it up to date would in no way interfere with or diminish any of the existing privileges of people already in Australia.

"The whole intention is to add to, not take away from, what we have now".

Mr. Grassby said that he had spent a considerable number of years at school in the United Kingdom and had also served in the British Army and some of his long standing friends from those days had settled in South Australia and he was looking forward to seeing them.